



environmental update  
find out about issues that  
matter to you

Select an Issue

my backyard  
stay in touch with events,  
issues and chapters in your area

Select a Place

my  
chapter

EXPLORE, ENJOY AND PROTECT THE PLANET

## Communities at Risk:

## communities at risk: Herculaneum, Missouri

- Introduction
- Alabama, **Anniston**
- Arkansas, **Plainview**
- Colorado, **Denver**
- Florida, **Lake Park and Riviera Beach**
- Georgia, **Atlanta**
- Georgia, **Early County**
- Idaho and Washington, **Lake Coeur d'Alene and Spokane River**
- Illinois, **Waukegan**
- Maine, **Corinna**
- Massachusetts, **Fairhaven**
- Minnesota, **Minneapolis**
- Missouri, **Herculaneum**
- Missouri, **Oak Grove Village**
- Montana, **Rimini**
- Nebraska, **Omaha**
- New Hampshire, **Nashua**
- New Jersey, **Edison**
- North Carolina, **Asheville**
- Ohio, **Middletown**
- Oklahoma, **Ottawa County**
- Oregon, **Portland**
- Pennsylvania, **Lansdale**
- South Dakota, **Black Hills**
- Texas, **Port Arthur**
- Wisconsin, **Lower Fox River and Green Bay**
- Endnotes

### Doe Run Lead Smelter Poisoning Area Children

In Herculaneum, Missouri, a small town of about 2,800 people 30 miles south of St. Louis, 28 percent of children under age six have unsafe levels of lead in their blood. In some areas of town, blood-lead levels are even higher.(1) Parents hose down swingsets in their backyards to remove lead particles before their children play on them, and some backyards have such high levels of lead that it's unsafe for children to play there at all. Some residents have moved out of their homes altogether so lead can be cleaned from the interior of their houses and from their yards.(2)



The death of Lori Pedersen's daughter of a lung embolism at 20 may have been due to the ingestion of lead and sulfuric acid from the Doe Run smelter.

"It's just emotionally exhausting to have to deal with the lead contamination," said Leslie Warden, a Herculaneum resident and former City Council member who has fought-so far unsuccessfully-to get cleanup funds from the federal Superfund program. "Vacuuming isn't vacuuming, it's lead removal. I have small nieces and nephews, and the thought of having them in my house, exposed to lead dust on the floor, makes me cringe."(3)

The source of the problem is the Doe Run Company's lead smelter, the largest and oldest of its kind in the United States. The smelter's massive smokestack, a landmark since the late 1800s, looms above Herculaneum. The smelter takes in fine millings from the lead mines in eastern and south-central Missouri and converts them into lead-which is then used in shielding, in batteries and other applications where "virgin" lead (with no impurities) is required.(4)

Lead dust from the ore-hauling trucks, air emissions from the smelter, and runoff from veritable mountains of smelter waste are released to the environment. In 2000 alone, the Doe Run Company admitted releasing more than 2.2 millions of pounds of lead into the environment, mostly to on-site piles of smelter waste and directly to the air.(5) As a result, air, water, soil, and ultimately children's blood have become polluted with lead.(6)

40315377



Superfund

On February 26, 2002, the





Recreation on toxic "slag" piles is a common sight in Herculaneum.

Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS) released a Health Consultation that contained the results of their blood-lead census and other sampling conducted in August and October 2001. Overall, the rate of elevated blood-lead (over 10 micrograms per deciliter) in Herculaneum children six years of age and under was 28 percent. Within a half-mile of

the lead smelter, more than 50 percent of the children had unsafe levels of lead in their blood.(7)

Children are more vulnerable to lead poisoning than adults, according to the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry. Exposure even to small amounts of lead can harm a child's mental and physical development, and larger exposures can result in blood anemia and brain damage. Lead is most dangerous for young and unborn children, who can be exposed through their mothers. If mothers or babies are exposed to high levels of lead, effects can include premature births, smaller babies, decreased mental ability in infants, learning difficulties, and reduced growth in young children.(8)

Prompted by these findings, the Missouri Department of Health posted signs all over Herculaneum advising citizens to avoid contact with surfaces exposed to lead dust, and the Missouri Department of Natural Resources issued a "cease and desist" order against Doe Run. The company has agreed to buy-out homes and yards in the area on a schedule of "worst first"-it will be required to make purchase offers on about 160 homes by December 2004.(9)

The ability of the Doe Run Company, a subsidiary of Renco Group Inc., to comply with its agreement with the state of Missouri depends not just on the company's cooperation but also its continued solvency, which is in doubt. In May 2001 Doe Run warned Stephen Mahfood, director of the Missouri Department of Natural Resources (DNR), that it lacked the resources to make environmental improvements as quickly as the state had requested. In March 2002 the company, which is struggling under a heavy debt load, was unable to meet interest payments on its debt. Two of Renco Group's other businesses are in bankruptcy, and Missouri DNR is now studying what would happen if Doe Run entered bankruptcy. (10)

Concerned that the company may enter bankruptcy before cleaning up the health threat it has created in Herculaneum, Missouri Governor Bob Holden, Senator Jean Carnahan and Representative Richard Gephardt (in whose congressional district Herculaneum is located) have asked the EPA to place the site on Superfund's priority cleanup list.(11) So far, however, the EPA has not done so.

"We fought for NPL [Superfund priority cleanup] listing

because if the lead smelter goes bankrupt, we want the safety net that Superfund provides," said former councilmember Warden. "Without Superfund funding, Doe Run can balk at EPA orders knowing that the EPA won't have the resources to enforce them in court. Without Superfund, there would be no hope for small towns like ours. We would be at the mercy of large corporations."(12)

---

[Up to Top](#)